

**U.S. Department of Justice**

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## **News Release**

Paul J. McNulty, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, Donald W. Thompson, Jr., Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Richmond Field Division, and Anthony Crawford, Postal Inspector in Charge, United States Postal Service, Richmond, Virginia, announced that Robert Louis Ponzini, age 44, of Rocky Mount, North Carolina, pled guilty yesterday before United States Magistrate Judge David G. Lowe to one count of travelling with the intent to engage in a sexual act with a minor and one count of distributing child pornography. Ponzini faces a maximum penalty of 15 years imprisonment, and a fine of up to \$250,000, on each count. Sentencing is set for May 7, 2003, before United States District Judge James R. Spencer.

Ponzini first came to the attention of law enforcement on October 9, 2002. On that date, a U.S. Postal Inspector was conducting an undercover online investigation of a chat-room that had been created on America Online called "Older Men for Girls." While monitoring the chat-room, the Inspector, who was posing as a 13-year-old girl named "Jennifer," was sent an Instant Message by the defendant. During the discussion that followed, the defendant quickly expressed his desire to engage in sex with "Jennifer." Over the course of several weeks, the defendant repeatedly contacted "Jennifer" to finalize plans for a sexual rendezvous in the Richmond area. On October 25, 2002, Ponzini sent the Inspector several e-mails that contained images of child pornography. On October 29, 2002, the defendant travelled from Rocky Mount, North Carolina, to Richmond, Virginia, where he was arrested shortly after checking into a hotel as part of his plan to meet with "Jennifer."

The case was investigated by the United States Postal Inspection Service and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Brian Hood.

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